A proactive ELF-aware approach to listening comprehension

ELFアプローチによるプロアクティブリスニングの活用法

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ABSTRACT

Listening comprehension (LC) is an integral part of language learning. Although course textbooks contain a diverse range of listening tasks for classroom learning, they also tend to share some common, albeit potentially problematic, features worth considering more deeply; namely, 1) listening is presented as an isolated skill (i.e. detached from speaking), 2) visually-based supplementary material is often underutilized, and 3) learners play a predominantly passive role in the process. The current paper will argue that such traditional approaches to LC are not reflective of real-world conditions our learners are likely to encounter, and to some extent, may even run counter to our teaching aims. With this in mind, the paper will present an alternative approach to LC, developed by the author, which can be used either as an adjunct activity to existing listening segments in course textbooks or as a substitute for them. In this approach, the source of auditory output is not technology, but rather, it is the learners who engage in reading transcripts of listening texts aloud to each other in pairs. This participatory process places ownership of the language in the hands of the learners and opens, rather than closes, the door to learner inquiry and the negotiation of meaning during the listening task itself, providing greater authenticity and compatibility with ELF-oriented principles than traditional approaches.

KEYWORDS: Listening Comprehension, Communication Strategies, Language Ownership, Non-verbal Communication

1. INTRODUCTION

The American author and humorist, Mark Twain once stated, "If we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two tongues and one ear." From our daily experience, it is clearly evident that successful human communication depends greatly on one's ability to listen effectively. It follows then that listening comprehension (LC) has been a staple of language learning since the inception of

formal language education.

Over the course of many decades, language teaching has steadily evolved and made major strides along the way. Beginning with behaviorist native-speaker-centric approaches such as the Audio-lingual Method, a gradual shift in attitudes and perceptions brought about the introduction of more communicative approaches to language learning. In more modern times, the term English as a Foreign Language (EFL) came to be viewed by some as an overly narrow (i.e. a one-size-fits-all) description of language learning. This paradigm shift in turn led to the emergence of the new and evolving field of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) which, due to globalization and the rapid growth of and increasing accessibility to technology, recognizes the unique nature and growing number of interactions between non-native speakers (NNSs) who use English as a common language of choice. What is more, the realization that, during such interactions, speakers may not conform to native English speaker norms suggests that a native-speaker-centric model of language proficiency may not be adequate for meeting the communication needs of an ever-expanding circle of NNSs.

And yet, despite such advancements, I will argue that standard approaches to LC – particularly lengthy listening tasks as they appear in contemporary course textbooks and standardized English tests (such as TOEIC and TOEFL) – are, in some respects at least, reflective of bygone behaviorist approaches to language learning which assume (figuratively speaking) the learner has *three ears* and *no tongue*, and which, given my present-day ELF objectives, may warrant reconsideration. Thus, to address the preceding claims, the current paper will first highlight certain dissimilarities between ELF and EFL to clearly distinguish the two. The author will then provide a description of Pro-Active Listening (PAL), an ELF-aware LC approach that can be used to complement (or as a substitute to) existing traditional LC activities, followed by a rationale for PAL and ways to implement it.

2. STRATEGIC COMPETENCE IN EFL AND ELF CONTEXTS

Based on a native-speaker-centric model of learning, EFL pedagogy applies native-like standards on the learner. It also aims to integrate the learner into the L1 target community through a process of imitation and adoption of pre-existing native-speaker linguacultural norms (Seidlhofer, 2011).
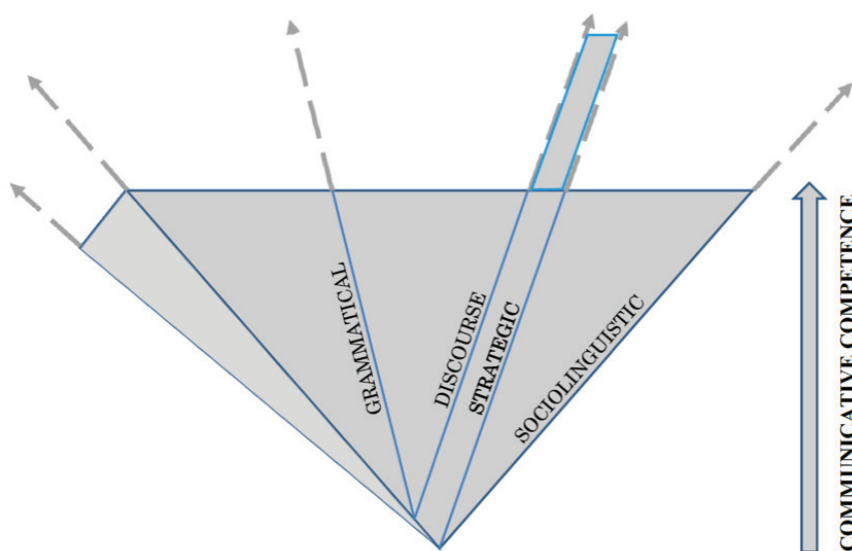
Regarding the development of communicative competence, EFL theory proposes that strategic competence, or the "ability to adapt one's communicative strategies to a variety of changing and often unexpected interpersonal conditions" in order to "compensate for imperfect knowledge of rules – or limiting factors in their application", although an ever-present component in the communicative competence framework, plays an especially crucial role in the early stages of a language learner's development (Savignon, 1997, pp. 45-47). The term 'communicative strategies' (CSs), as mentioned above, refers (but is not limited) to strategies such as

"rephrasing, repetition, emphasis, seeking clarification, circumlocution, avoidance, [...] and even message modification" (p. 47).

The development of and relationship between strategic competence and other competencies, which collectively make up communicative competence, is summed up by Savignon (1997) visually in the form of an inverted pyramid (see Figure 1) which she describes as follows:

> Beginning with the inverted tip of the pyramid and moving upward, grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence increase along with a corresponding overall increase in communicative competence. Strategic competence is present at all levels of proficiency although its importance in relation to the other components diminishes as knowledge of grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse rules increases. (p. 49)

In other words, as a learner becomes more 'native-like', the significance of (e.g. their reliance on) CSs decreases over time.
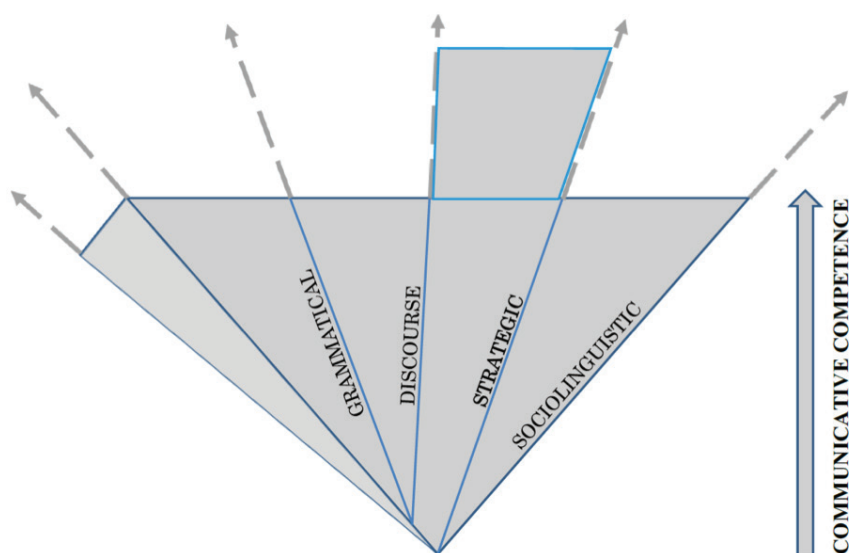

Figure 1. Communicative Competence in an EFL context.
Note: *The illustration is a representation of Savignon's (1997) 'inverted pyramid' and contains modifications made by the author for the purpose of clarity.

I believe, however, that a model which sees the significance of strategic competence, i.e. CSs, steadily declining over time as the learner becomes more native-like is not characteristic of typical ELF interactions, and thus, is not a suitable model on which to base pedagogical goals in ELF-based instruction. To illustrate, because ELF refers to the use of English as "the common language of choice, among speakers who come from different linguacultural backgrounds" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 200), interlocutors may vary widely in language proficiency

and may not, albeit may not wish to, conform to native speaker norms. Hence, unpredictability and unfamiliarity are inherent traits of ELF interactions and thus ELF-based pedagogical aims are a reflection of this. As Seidlhofer (2011) states, ELF interactions prioritize mutual intelligibility over conformity to native-speaker linguacultural norms to achieve communicative goals. Thus, rather than one's ability to adhere and conform to native-speaker norms being the benchmark of effective communication, ELF-informed principles suggest it is one's ability to make full use of one's resources (linguistic or otherwise) which affects outcomes in ELF interactions.

In light of the above, I would argue that CSs play a significantly more crucial role in ELF interactions than in EFL contexts. By this, I mean that the extent to which an ELF user is likely to encounter nonunderstanding depends not only on one's *individual* level of communicative competence, but also on the competence and linguacultural norms of one's *interlocutor*. To illustrate, in an EFL context, attaining greater proficiency equates to one becoming more native-like, and with greater native-like proficiency comes greater certainty, meaning fewer nonunderstandings are likely to occur. In this sense, ELF interactions, in which one's interlocutor is a NNS whose proficiency and linguacultural norms may be far from native-like, become less predictable and more uncertain. In this respect, I believe that viewing Savignon's inverted pyramid through the lens of ELF (see Figure 2) would reveal that strategic competence, rather than diminishing over time, retains its importance, making CSs an indispensable tool in ELF users' communicative repertoire; always at-the-ready to cope with the demands of a potentially unfamiliar and constantly changing linguacultural landscape.

GRAMMATICAL

DISCOURSE

STRATEGIC

SOCIOLINGUISTIC

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Figure 2. Communicative Competence in an ELF context.
Note: *The illustration is an adaptation of Savignon's (1997) 'inverted pyramid' created by the author to visually describe communicative competence in an ELF context.

Thus, what the model presented above means for ELF-aware pedagogy is a greater need to create opportunities in the classroom for learners to practice accommodation and adaptation and employ a variety of communication/pragmatic strategies since they are "very crucial to overcome [⋯] non-understanding and to promote [⋯] effectiveness and clarity" (Lee, 2013, p. 198). It is for these reasons, therefore, that ELF-informed teaching should include activities which, "if realistic and meaningful can motivate learners to actively participate in the interaction, employing various pragmatic strategies to achieve shared understanding" (Kaur, 2014, p. 167). It is my contention that PAL-based activities can provide such opportunities.

3. PRO-ACTIVE LISTENING (PAL)

Looking back in human history, before the advent of communication technologies, we find that the act of listening was an interactive process. By this I mean the hearer had direct access to the person they were listening to and could (if he or she wished) interact with him or her if nonunderstanding occurred. In our modern world, on the other hand, our sources of listening are more varied, including radio and TV broadcasts, movies, public announcements made over loudspeakers, etc. Even though technology has had an effect on the way we listen, I would argue that, even in the case of indirect sources of listening (i.e. technology), we still maintain some level of control, for instance, we can repair nonunderstanding by enquiring through a third party or simply by rewinding a DVD. This sense of control, or ownership, over the process is as much an inherent part of human communication

as it is our right to query. Yet, during typical LC activities in the classroom, we do not allow learners to exercise this basic freedom.

Hence, PAL is a form of LC that tries to address this imbalance by making classroom listening practice interactive, and in doing so, more in tune with real-world processes. To do this, the PAL approach does not rely on traditional means of auditory input, such as a CD player. Instead, it is the learners themselves who provide the input by reading aloud transcripts to each other, thereby allowing the listener to interact with the source. In terms of the learner, therefore, LC may no longer be a passive one-way process outside of their control, but rather an active two-way process that offers them control through the application of CSs.

The following section provides a rationale for PAL based on two classroom-related factors that, in my view, make the task of developing learners' strategic competence particularly challenging. It is hoped that the arguments made will, at the very least, demonstrate a need to rethink the role of traditional approaches to LC and possibly may recognize PAL as a viable alternative.

4. RATIONALE: CHALLENGES WE FACE IN THE CLASSROOM

4.1 Real-world Speaking vs. Classroom Speaking
Could it be that well-intentioned measures we implement for the purpose of maximizing classroom learning may also be hampering our efforts to do so?

Creating situations in the classroom which generate authentic opportunities for learners to develop their strategic competence requires elements of uncertainty. Although uncertainty occurs commonly and naturally in real-world settings, recreating such conditions in the classroom can be a challenge due, in part, to the structured and sometimes predictable nature of formal learning environments. This is significant since it is unfamiliarity and unpredictability that is likely to trigger nonunderstanding and activate strategic competence, not certainty.

In the real-world, a NNS may be required to engage in unfamiliar topics that are beyond their linguistic ability and with interlocutors of wide ranging ages, accents, linguacultural backgrounds, and varying levels of English proficiency, with whom they are unfamiliar. In formal educational contexts, on the other hand, interactions are more likely to occur in a culturally and linguistically homogeneous setting between dyads of a similar age group, level of language proficiency, and generally speaking, who share common interests and life experiences.

This climate of familiarity extends to course textbooks. To begin with, the content is level-appropriate and distributed among the class in the same form, hence, learners own and use material that is identical. Learners also, for the most part, have an opportunity to prepare and rehearse before they engage in communication activities contained within. Interestingly, though, an activity that appears commonly in English communication textbooks that in itself is not interactive (i.e. communicative) but does generate, I would argue untapped, uncertainty is LC. This

is because learners are required to hear the listening text *before* they can examine it. Thus, rather than expecting learners to actively enquire when nonunderstaning occurs during the activity, they are instructed to merely listen. In a sense then, the traditional approach to LC is, in my view, analogous to an information gap activity *without* the usual (and potentially valuable) interactive component.

In light of the above, I believe PAL is an effective means to access an untapped source of uncertainty (in terms of interactive communication) and provide more real-world opportunities for learners to develop their strategic competence.

4.2 Real-world Listening vs. Classroom Listening

During real-world listening, we often have access to visual (i.e. non-vocal) cues such as a speaker's gestures, facial expressions, and so on. Classroom listening tasks, however, are predominantly audio-based (i.e. not visual-based). This has implications since "effective listening is more than a cognitive process; to 'hear' the listener must not only understand what is being said verbally, but also the non-verbal communication that informs what is said" (Caspersz & Stasinska, 2015, p. 1). In the absence of such paralinguistic features, standard LC becomes not only a less natural act, but in the case of protracted listening tasks, perhaps overly challenging, if not unnecessarily burdening for learners. A simple thought experiment may serve to underscore the significance of non-vocal phenomena. If, for example, I were to play a foreign movie in a language unfamiliar to me with the screen covered, I could assume that, apart from any non-lexical information encoded in the actors' words through their tone of voice, sentence stress, etc., I would comprehend little else (if anything at all). If, on the other hand, I were to *watch* a movie with the volume turned down, I suspect my understanding of the storyline, despite my complete lack of lexical knowledge, would be vastly improved. Naturally, combining the audio with the visual would aid me even more. All too often, however, LC fails to fully utilize this potentially valuable and core aspect of human communication.

One other feature that distinguishes real-world listening from classroom listening is that the former is seldom a passive process whereas the latter is. Among other things, during the act of listening in the real world a listener tends to backchannel and, when nonunderstanding occurs, he or she (quite naturally) will ask questions. In classroom settings, however, listening is disconnected from speaking, and learners are instructed to simply sit and listen.

In view of the above dissimilarities, Vogely's (1999) contention that LC can provoke debilitating anxiety in language learners, may come as no surprise. Indeed, recent studies have found evidence to support this claim. Elkhafaifi (2005), for example, concluded that "there is [⋯] support for the existence of listening anxiety as a phenomenon related to, but distinguishable from, general learning anxiety" (p. 214). More revealing evidence comes from Kim's (2002) study which found that "language learners do indeed experience anxiety in response to

listening comprehension" (p. 3). Of the 253 Korean university students studying English that Kim surveyed, a significant number "suffered from low confidence" (p. 16) and "tension and worry over English listening" (p. 27). Contributing factors included a) fear and frustration regarding missed key words, b) not having enough processing time, and c) insufficient prior knowledge. Specifically, subjects believed that "If I let my mind drift even a little bit while listening to English, I worry I will miss important ideas" (78%), "I am nervous when I am listening to English if I am not familiar with the topic" (74%), "When a person speaks English very fast, I worry that I might not understand all of it" (73%), and "When listening to English, I often understand the words but still can't quite understand what the speaker means" (54%) (pp. 12-13). Additionally, more than half of the subjects expressed their frustration over not being able to listen at their own pace and insufficient time to process information.

On a final note, I believe the current discussion leads us to some deeper issues underlying standard approaches to LC. For instance, if classroom practices deny learners some degree of ownership over the listening process, might such a situation stem from ideological perspectives privileging native speakers (NSs) and denying language rights to NNSs? Do our actions also imply that, in the real world, learners will be *expected* to understand everything they hear, and thus, should refrain from *interrupting* NS when nonunderstanding occurs – i.e. simply allow NSs to hold the floor? These are pertinent issues the author would like to explore in future research. For the time being, however, it is hoped that the foregoing discussion has been sufficient in, at the very least, highlighting some of the limitations of standard approaches to LC, and opening the door to allow for alternative approaches, such as PAL.

5. PAL IN ACTION

5.1 A Resource for ELF-aware Teaching Using PAL

7 Billion Others (see Figure 3) is a not-for-profit Internet site that is ideally suited for the purposes of PAL and, I believe, ELF-informed teaching. The website is free to use and contains podcasts of 6,000 interviews (consisting of 50 languages) with people from 84 countries and from many walks of life, grouped into 26 themes (e.g. identity, family, happiness, love, anger, discrimination, fear, marriage, money, childhood dreams, dreams now, joy, memory, nature, etc.). Interviews recorded in English feature both NSs and NNSs and all (6,000) contain English subtitles. This is important for two reasons. First, teachers can create a full transcript of any interview for PAL practice by simply copying and pasting the subtitles. Second, even though the majority of the 6,000 interviews are spoken in languages other than English, it does not mean they are irrelevant – as would otherwise be the case with traditional LC approaches. This is because PAL does not rely on audio/audio-visual equipment to deliver the listening

content, but rather the learners themselves. Thus, regardless of the language spoken in an interview, simply creating a transcript of it using the English subtitles is sufficient for PAL. Hence, using PAL over traditional approaches to LC provides teachers with access to all 6,000 interviews in *7 Billion Others* for potential classroom use.
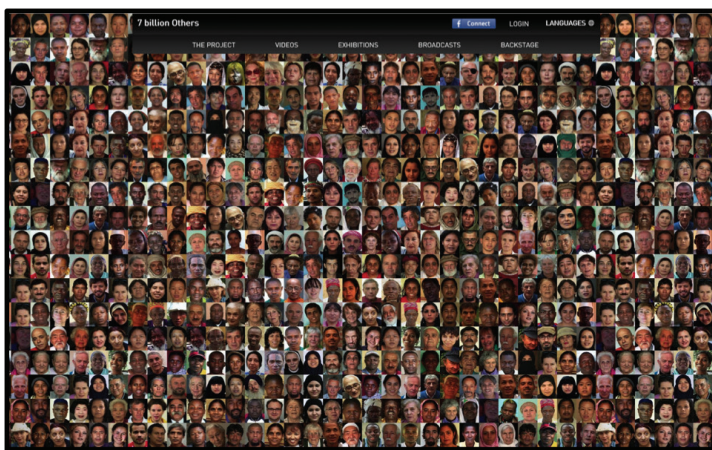

Figure 3. 7 Billion Others (http://www.7billionothers.org)

5.2 Applying PAL in the Classroom

Unlike much traditional LC, during which the whole class listens to the *same* listening task, in the case of PAL, the learners must first be divided into two equal groups; i.e. group A and group B. Hence, the teacher must prepare *two* (or more) listening tasks; one for group A and one other for group B (see Appendices A & B). After the two groups have received their transcripts, the process of PAL can begin.

There are two stages in PAL: 1) a preparation stage and 2) a practice stage. In the first stage, provide learners with sufficient time to read through their transcripts and process the information. Typically, I instruct learners to work together *within* their groups and to ensure that each member is ready by the designated time. Thus, by the end of the first stage, it is important that learners feel they are able (or at the least be willing to try) to clarify, paraphrase, or reformulate the language in any other way, including use of paralinguistic features, to respond effectively to any nonunderstandings by their partner – should they occur – during the following stage.

In the second (main) stage, learners from the two groups come together to form pairs; i.e. student A and student B. Before beginning PAL, however, I explain that they will be taking on the role of the person whose transcript they are about to read – student A 'becomes' Cecilla and student B 'becomes' Maria – and to imagine they are sitting together in a coffee shop, about to have a chat.

Student A begins reading their transcript and student B 'listens' *and*

'watches'. Student B can stop student A at any time (multiple times) to confirm meaning, request repetition, ask for clarification, and so on. Accordingly, student A must respond to student B's requests and the process of negotiation of meaning begins. At the end of the reading, student A checks understanding by asking student B a set of comprehension questions. Then it becomes student B's turn to read his or her transcript to student A and the above process is repeated. At the end of the activity, learners return to their original group (i.e. A or B) and, as a final comprehension check, I play the two videos to the whole class before finally eliciting responses to the comprehension questions from the two groups.

5.3 Extension Activities for PAL

In addition to providing opportunities for learners to enquire and develop their strategic competence, PAL can be used as a stepping stone to pursue other ELF-related objectives with a variety of follow-up activities.

Wen (2012) states that it is important for ELF users to "comprehend non-native syntactic structures" (p. 374). With this aim in mind, the transcripts used in PAL can be applied to raise learners' language awareness *post*-PAL by drawing learners' attention to certain non-native linguistic features and asking them, "How might a NS say this?" To illustrate, samples from Cecilla's transcript such as 1) "Said but you're a female" and 2) "Was in the oil industry" reveal that, even though Cecilla – who in my mind is an effective ELF communicator – omits the subject pronouns *They* and *It*, such differences do not necessarily interfere with meaning.

Helping ELF learners to "understand English with non-native accents" (Wen, 2012, p. 374) is yet another important objective. Interestingly, many of the interviews presented in *7 Billion Others*, regardless of the theme, begin with a self-introduction (Identity) by the speaker (see Appendix C). The introductions are generally brief (approximately half a minute on average) and relate to familiar topics (e.g. the speaker's name, place of birth, occupation, family, etc.), which I believe makes them potentially low-anxiety-provoking for learners. Hence, I use the self-introductions for raising learners' awareness of different varieties of non-native accents using a traditional LC approach (i.e. not PAL). This involves playing the video to the whole class and having learners identify individual linguistic items using gap-fill exercises (see Appendix C).

Finally, Wen (2012) proposes that teachers expose ELF learners to three varieties of culture: 1) target language cultures, 2) NNS cultures, and 3) the learners' own culture. Accordingly, because *7 Billion Others* is rich in cultural diversity, the material used during PAL can later be used to stimulate and facilitate cross-cultural awareness through guided classroom discussion.

6. CONCLUSION

Considering that one of my primary goals as an ELF-aware teacher is to provide authentic opportunities that will promote and develop learners' strategic competence through adaptation and accommodation, I believe PAL can serve as a viable and promising pathway toward trying to meet those objectives. When engaged in PAL, ownership (and responsibility) is in the hands of the learner, and rather than playing the role of passive agents in the listening process, learners work actively together to negotiate meaning and overcome nonunderstanding. All in all, these are valuable pedagogical and learning opportunities that traditional approaches to LC are not able to provide.

It may be interesting to note that the first time I used PAL with learners, I experienced a moment of apprehension and began to think, "Isn't this just like cheating?", "After all, we're *supposed to be* doing LC, and I'm allowing my learners to ask for repetition and clarification." – something akin to giving them a reading test *and* the answer key along with it. After more than twenty years of doing LC the traditional way, perhaps such hesitation was to be expected. However, after reflecting on my ELF objectives, I was reassured that what my learners were doing was indeed a natural process and that, far from being handed the answers on the proverbial silver platter (i.e. cheating), they were more engaged in PAL than during traditional LC and earning their right to ownership over the process.

Finally, it is important to clarify that I am not suggesting we need to *replace* standard approaches to LC with alternatives like PAL. That would require long and intensive research backed up by strong empirical evidence from many sources indicating a need to do so. Clearly, that is beyond the scope of the current paper. What I do believe, however, is that PAL can offer teachers, if they choose to use it, a unique alternative to standard LC that is more humanistic, places ownership of the language in the hands of the learner, and provides a more authentic listening context to enhance mutual intelligibility and help learners develop strategic competence. Therefore, rather than using traditional forms of LC as a default – a one size fits all – approach to every listening context, PAL allows us to be more selective. By considering a variety of factors, we can determine whether PAL, a traditional approach, or a combination of the two would best meet the needs of our learners.

By rethinking the role of traditional LC and incorporating PAL into our collective ELF teaching repertoire as a viable alternative, I believe we stand to lose nothing; instead, we stand to gain. Simply put, PAL is one way to facilitate more authentic listening conditions in the classroom, and with them, the real-world demands that come with them so our learners may develop the skills they require to communicate effectively beyond the classroom.

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Appendix A

DISCRIMINATION

CECILLA / LIVES IN UNITED STATES
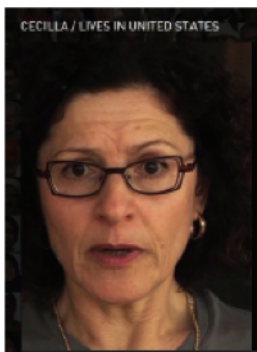
STUDENT A

Part 1: Understanding & Speaking

A) Read the transcript below and answer the four questions in Part 2 (A).

When I…, I finished my engineering degree, in Venezuela, and I was looking for a job, when I went to look for a job, and fill out the applications, I completely,…I fit perfectly the description of what they were looking for.

And when I went to turn in my application, they told me that they were not looking for a female. They were looking for an engineer. And I told them: "I AM an engineer." "Said but you're a female. We're not looking for a female." So,…it was really difficult to process that.

Nonetheless, I did find a job in a 100% dominated male environment. Was in the oil industry. And it is possible.

B) Imagine you are Cecilla, and you are in a coffee shop with Student B. Read the transcript to Student B. Be ready to stop to repeat, clarify, or paraphrase your words if and when Student B requests it.

Part 2: Pro-Active Listening (PAL) Comprehension

A) After you finish reading, ask Student B the questions below. Check his or her responses.

1. In which country did Cecilla go to school?
2. Why was Cecilla surprised when she went looking for a job?
3. In which industry did Ceilla find a job?
4. Does Cecilla believe it is possible to overcome discrimination? Explain why or why not.

B) Student B will be Maria. Listen and answer the questions below. You can stop Maria any time to ask for repetition, clarification, etc.

Maria

1. How is Maria treated at her workplace?
2. Do you think Maria plans to change her job? Explain why or why not.
3. Does Maria think gender discrimination will change in the near future? Explain why or why not.
4. Do you think Maria will complain about her pay to her boss? Explain why or why not.

Appendix B

DISCRIMINATION
MARIA / LIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA
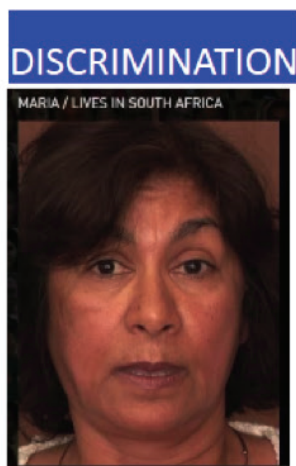
STUDENT **B**

Part 1: Understanding & Speaking

A) Read the transcript below and answer the four questions in Part 2 (A).

If I was a white male doing the same job I'm doing, I definitely would be rewarded much better. And I know that for a fact. I know that for a fact. It does hurt, but what can we do? I have to work! If I go here, if I go there, it's gonna be the same thing. And that's what I mean.

Why I mean it will take another 3 generations or so? Our family,... Because of my thinking, my conditioning myself,... that accept it, ...accept it. I probably have installed that type of thinking into my grandchildren. I may, I may not have.

B) Imagine you are Maria, and you are in a coffee shop with Student A. Read the transcript to Student A. Be ready to stop to repeat, clarify, or paraphrase your words if and when Student A requests it.

Part 2: Pro-Active Listening (PAL) Comprehension

A) After you finish reading, ask Student A the questions below. Check his or her responses.

1. How is Maria treated at her workplace?
2. Does Maria plan to change her job? Explain why or why not.
3. Does Maria think gender discrimination will change in the near future? Explain.
4. Do you think Maria will complain to her boss about her pay? Explain why or why not.

B) Student B will be Cecilla. Listen and answer the questions below. You can stop Cecilla any time to ask for repetition, clarification, etc.

Cecilla

1. In which country did Cecilla go to school?
2. Why was Cecilla surprised when she went looking for a job? Explain what happened to her.
3. In which industry did Cecilla find a job?
4. Does Cecilla believe it is possible to overcome discrimination? Explain why or why not.

Appendix C

IDENTITY

CECILLA / LIVES IN UNITED STATES (00:48)

Listen to Cecilla introduce herself. Fill in the blanks (1~7) below. After each blank, the teacher will pause the video briefly.

I am Cecilla Temponi. And I was··· I am 52 years···**1.** (_____) years old.

I was born in Venezuela, but I am now a **2.** (_____) citizen. I am married,

and··· with a person from **3.** (_____). And I have **4.** (_____) children.

My two children are···umm···30 years old and 26 years old.

So···, I am a **5.** (_____), and···at Texas State University, in the

area of operations **6.** (_____). And···umm, I love what I do. And I

live in Texas for the last,···ah, **7.** (_____) years.